THE SILENCES OF THE MASTER

JOHN WALKER POWELL, JR.

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THE SILENCES OF THE MASTER

BY

JOHN WALKER POWELL, JR.

AUTHOR OF "THE POET'S VISION OF MAN"

CINCINNATI: JENNINGS AND GRAHAM
NEW YORK: EATON AND MAINS

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To

The Rev. Frank J. McConnell,
To whom the author is indebted for a brief class sermon, in seminary days, which suggested the theme and its treatment, these pages are affectionately dedicated.

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FOREWORD

Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and
limb.
Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from
Him?

Dark is the world to thee: thyself art the reason
why;
For is He not all but that which has power to feel,
"I am I?"

Glory about thee, without thee; and thou fulfillest
thy doom,
Making Him broken gleams, and a stifled splendor
and gloom.

Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and Spirit with
Spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than
hands and feet.

—TENNYSON, "The Higher Pantheism."

Not since Paul stood on Mars' Hill has it been so true that thousands are worshiping an Unknown God. The philosopher despairs of penetrating the Mystery at the heart of Reality. The scientist stands confounded at the manifestation of a Power so mighty; bewildered and alone in a Creation so vast. The common man, freed by education from the age-long bondage of superstition, forgets to pray. Yet the shallow skepticism of a former generation has practically disappeared. Human hearts are full of longing. While Mr. Clifford mourns, "The Great Companion is dead," there are very many in Christendom who are saying, "O, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat."

As men grow more generally cultivated and refined, the tragedy of human life deep-

ens. When the simpler wants of the physical being are satisfied, the deeper needs of the spirit make their cry heard. In God's apparent indifference to this call lies humanity's Gethsemane. Yet with the patriarch we must cry, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." The very heart of our Christian faith is belief in the Father-Love which suffers with human sin and woe till man is redeemed and glorified.

"So through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me, who have died for thee!'"
—Browning, "An Epistle."

AN UNKNOWN GOD

9

"YE men of Athens, in all things I perceive that ye are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What, therefore, ye worship in ignorance, this set I forth unto you. The God that made the world . . . made of one every nation of men . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after and find Him."—Acts xvii, 22–27.

"VERILY Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior."—Isa xlv, 15.

THE feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened.
—LONGFELLOW, "Hiawatha."

We are not unfamiliar with the idea that God is continually striving to reveal Himself to men. The heavens declare His glory. History bespeaks His power and righteousness. The life of every man shows forth His Providence. He that hath eyes to see may find on every hand the evidence of the Divine Presence and the Divine Love.

> "Earth 's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush aflame with God."

Not alone the still small voice, but equally the rushing mighty wind, the earthquake and the fire are to the modern Elijah filled with the glory of the Lord. We see Him in all the wonderful processes of Nature, as the magic of Science lays her secrets open before us. We hear Him in the voice of Truth's prophets, of India or China or

Greece, no less than of Israel; of modern, no less than of ancient, times. We find Him also in all the manifestations of human goodness, in noble courage, in self-sacrificing love.

But in our rejoicing over this truth, we must not overlook another no less important, whose unrecognized presence often brings confusion to our thought and perplexity to our souls. God not only reveals Himself to men; He often hides Himself from them. Clouds and darkness are the habitation of His throne. His reserve is as striking as His revelation. We can understand why God should make Himself known. We see humanity wandering through the mazes of earthly existence, crude, ignorant, inexperienced, beset by a thousand dangers and temptations on every hand. The broad way spreads its allurements for wayward feet, but the end thereof is destruction. Narrow and rugged is the way of life, and its

entrance vine-grown and easy to miss. What sort of God would He be who should refuse to reveal Himself to childlike and ignorant man, and to lead him in the Way Everlasting? So far are we to-day from denying Revelation, that we rather will not believe it to have been confined to one chosen and favored people.

But how is it that He could ever be silent? Why has the smoke from humanity's altars ascended for so many centuries to a heaven apparently indifferent? The degradation and bondage of heathendom cries aloud for pity and relief. Why has it not long since been granted? Mothers have kneeled by the bedside of stricken babes crying unto God in agony of spirit, and the heavens above have been as brass. The struggling forces of righteousness have fallen before the armies of evil, the while their prayers ascended like incense before the Lord. It is useless to blink these facts. Let us not

be misunderstood. We have not said that God *was* indifferent; that He did not in the long run bring relief. We are concerned just now only with the plain and bitter fact that oft-times we seek Him and do not find Him.

"He hides Himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of ill are most abroad.

Or He deserts us in the hour
The fight is all but lost;
And seems to leave us to ourselves
Just when we need Him most."

We are accustomed to say that He always answers our prayers, even if sometimes He is constrained to answer "No." But does this not conceal rather than solve the difficulty? Is it always true that He answers anything, even "No?" Or if He speak, is it not often after the most weary and heart-breaking delay? We may conceive of a man for some reason pretending not to hear his

child's request, or to be indifferent to it, the while that he really intended to grant it. We may imagine him carrying it out unknown to the child, and then after many days allowing him suddenly to discover the desired boon. But is it not clear that under all but the most extraordinary circumstances such proceedings on the part of a human father would be childish and absurd, and our sympathy would go out without reserve to the little one whose tender feelings had been thus trifled with? But wherein does this differ from a common conception of God as giving us something other than what we desired, or granting our request in a different way from that in which we wanted it, with nothing whatever in the way of explanation or compensation; leaving us for weeks or months to think that He had ignored our prayer altogether, only in the end to stumble onto the fact that it had actually been answered?

Some one may say that it lies not in the power of human consciousness to receive an impression or a suggestion from the Divine. If that be true, then prayer, if it have any reality at all, is purely a thing of objective asking and receiving. Then God answers some prayers, denies others—or rather ignores them—and that is the end of the matter. Yet even in that event we must ask why He is silent to some requests. But if the larger thought of humanity be the true one, which regards man as made in God's image and capable of some communion, some direct and personal relation with the Divine; then we must ask not merely why God does not grant our petition, but why it is so often the experience of humanity that prayer has no evident result even in the subjective world. Why does God seem to the majority of men so far off? Why do we not attain rest and peace?

There may be times when His silence is

only apparent. Nay, this must be true. Times when He speaks, but our ears are so filled with other sounds—the voices of self-interest, or the rush and roar of the world's life—that we are deaf to His message of peace. But other times there are when we wait in silence and loneliness of spirit the word which He should speak, and we hear no sound save the throbbing of our own hearts. Then the agony of life becomes well-nigh unbearable, and we know the meaning of that bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

That there must be some meaning even in this silence we are persuaded, else God would not be God. He can not be actuated by caprice or indifference, or any other of the unworthy motives which so often impel us to deny our children's requests. Neither can we content ourselves with the time-worn explanation, that He seeks to "try our faith." This must at least mean something more

than appears on the surface, or it were hardly worthy the Christian God. Surely He knows the quality of our faith without testing it. If the requisite faith be present, it were an insult to the man who exercises it, wantonly to put it to trial. If faith be wanting, how could He answer at all? No, the meaning of His silence must be found in some more far-reaching principles than these. The God who is a Father to the sons of men, who is seeking in all ways to reveal Himself to them, that in Him they might have life, the God whom the Scriptures reveal, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will not lightly refuse to listen to our prayer. If in His infinite wisdom and goodness He must refuse our requests, He will make even His refusal a revelation of His love. If in refusing He finds it necessary to appear indifferent, we may depend upon it that His silence is more pregnant than any speech would be; that even this is His revelation.

In seeking to trace this interpretation of God's silence, let us turn to the Revelation in Jesus Christ; for here we have the complete and perfect picture of God's relations to men. Is there anything in the life of the Master which will throw light on the problem before us?

Six times in the Gospels we are told that Jesus answered not a word to those who questioned Him. These examples of His silence are typical. They cover almost every sort of failure of human prayer. If we study them carefully we certainly shall find some glimpses of the God who hideth Himself. These incidents fall naturally into two groups: first, those in which the question expressed no real need or desire; and second, those in which real need seems to have met with refusal. Let us look at them thus grouped.

PRAYERS THAT NEED NO ANSWER

I. The Challenge of Enmity.

II. Idle and Flippant Curiosity.

III. Moral Cowardice.

IV. Insincerity.

"WHAT is the hope of the hypocrite? Will God hear his cry?"—Job xxvii, 8, 9.

"THERE they cry, but none giveth answer because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it."—Job xxxv, 12, 13.

"WOE to them . . . that say, Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it."—Isa. v, 19.

DARK is the world to thee: thyself art the reason why.—TENNYSON.

WE often affront God by offering prayers which we are not willing to have answered . . . Many of the prime objects of prayer enchant us only in the distance. Brought near to us, and in concrete forms, and made to grow lifelike in our conceptions, they very sensibly abate the pulse of our longing to possess them, because we can not but discover that to realize them in our lives, certain other darling objects must be sacrificed which we are not yet willing to part with.—AUSTIN PHELPS, "The Still Hour."

MY words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
—SHAKESPEARE, "Hamlet."

I

The Challenge of Enmity

Twice during the trial of Jesus He was confronted by false accusations at the hands of His enemies. He stood in the house of the high priest at that illegal midnight trial, when many false witnesses were brought forward against Him, "whose testimony agreed not together." At length two were found who declared, "This man said, I am able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days." Then the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Answerest Thou nothing? What is it that these witness against Thee?" But Jesus held His peace. Again when at daybreak the Council met to condemn Him, and afterward delivered Him to Pilate, the chief priests ac-

cused Him of many things, and Pilate said, "Answerest Thou nothing? Behold how many things they accuse Thee of." But He answered him nothing, "not even to one word, insomuch that the governor marveled greatly."

We can not but admire the simple dignity which the Master displayed in the face of this hypocrisy and implacable enmity. Nor is it at all difficult to analyze the reasons for His silence. On the one hand the accusations against Him fell by their own weight. Their absurdity was apparent to any one who knew the situation. The governor was not deceived for a moment. No answer was needed. An attempt to reply would have been almost an admission of guilt. On the other hand, his accusers, who were at the earlier trial also His judges, had already made up their minds against Him. Answer, amounting even to undoubted proof, would be useless. The only thing possible was to

meet the charges in manly and dignified silence.

Is there not a sort of prayer which is akin to the attitude of Jesus's enemies at His trial? An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. Unbelieving multitudes wag their heads and say, "Let Christ the Son of God come down from the cross and we will believe." Men out of the utter scorn of their unbelief say, "If there is such a God as you believe in, let Him show Himself. Let Him sweep away pain and sorrow from the earth; let Him compel the rich to divide their wealth with the poor; let Him show us a sign in the heaven above or the earth beneath, that we may see and believe." Can we be surprised that God ignores their challenge? Men who, having Moses and the Prophets, yet believe not, would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Even Christian people sometimes lend themselves to such folly, and beseech the Almighty to show a sign, that the enemies of the Lord may be confounded. Sometimes we hear it in prayers for a revival of religion. Sometimes it is advanced as an argument for faith-healing. Several years ago good people in a Western city set apart a day in which to convince an unbelieving world of the efficacy of prayer by praying for the conversion of a noted infidel. Recently an Oriental "Messiah" has challenged a notorious religious mountebank of our own country to a contest of prayer, declaring, "I am ready to pray him to death."

Such prayers as these never were, never can be answered. They are of the nature of a challenge to the Almighty. For Him to take notice of them would be to place Himself on the level of a boastful Oriental magician. We must not imagine that God pos-

sesses less dignity and good sense than the average well-bred gentleman. In the presence of such insolence on the part of His enemies, such folly on the part of His friends, He can do nothing less than hide Himself in majesty.

II

Idle and Flippant Curiosity

A second class of petitioners is represented by Herod. When Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean, he thought to shift the responsibility of this delicate situation to the shoulders of Herod, and at the same time to show the king a flattering deference, by sending Jesus to him for trial. Herod, we are told, was "exceeding glad" when he saw Jesus, for he had heard of Him, and hoped to have an exhibition of His wonder-working power. He questioned Him in many words, but Jesus maintained the same dignified silence. Not even was it broken when the baffled king mocked Him, arraying Him in gorgeous robes and hailing Him as King of the Jews.

Here again we have the questionings of one who felt no real need of the Christ, but was moved by an idle curiosity, by a desire for entertainment. Are there not many so-called prayers whose defect is precisely this? We ask many questions of God, not because their answer would bring us any nearer to Him, or afford us any real help in ordering our lives; but because we should like to know, to pry into certain things. Here belong the agelong and always baffled attempts to communicate with the spirit world. Granted the existence of such a sphere, it is difficult to see any reason in the nature of things why its inhabitants should not communicate with us. But men have in all ages sought to establish such communication without success. Why? Possibly for many reasons, but for one thing surely because no real good could come of it. It would only serve to distract our attention from the duties of the present life, or make us unwil-

ling to bear its burdens. The most that it could afford would be the gratification of our curiosity. The same thing may be said of all attempts to lift the veil of the future and know the coming events of this world's life. Necromancers, astrologers, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers of sorts there have always been, but sober, thoughtful investigation has always proven them impostors. God does not write the future on the palms of our hands nor proclaim it by the planets in their houses, nor reveal it in anywise to our prayer, because if we are faithful to the present the future will take care of itself. Even Biblical prophecy is no exception to the rule. Specific prediction of future events holds a very subordinate place even in Messianic prophecy; and it should be noted that the significance of such predictions as may be found was hidden as a rule from the prophets themselves, and did not appear till

the event had come to pass, so that as a matter of fact the future was not revealed even to them. The injunction of the Master to "take no thought for the morrow" is in harmony with the entire administration of God in human affairs. The desire to know has its legitimate place as a moving force in human affairs, but we need not expect God to waste His time or His eternity in answering idle questions.

The more must this be true when our curiosity is not only idle but flippant; when we seek not knowledge but entertainment. Herod wanted sport. He was the representative of the people who go to church to be amused. Do such people find God in the church? Never, save when sometimes He appears in judgment and terrifies them into solemnity. If it is necessary to hire a whistling soloist, or for the preacher to whistle his text, as the papers report one minister

to have done, in order to get people to church; then it were better far that we close our churches, and spend the money they cost in taking these same folks to Mont Pelée or to Niagara, or into the presence of some other terrifying or awe-inspiring spectacle of the natural world, until they shall realize the great and dreadful solemnity of life. The man who goes to church to see some one make a fool of himself to entertain the crowd would be much more likely to find God in the mountain or the cataract or the fearful fury of an ocean storm. There is in truth no need of a long-faced, canting religiosity. There are times when there is more piety in a laugh than in a season of prayer. But flippancy and frivolity are an abomination in the sight of God. For while the earnest, upright man need never fear anything that life or death may bring, and so may be cheerful and glad;

yet there are deep solemnities and awful realities in human life; and the laughter of fools who have never looked into the open mouth of the bottomless pit, nor felt within themselves the possibilities of endless doom, is like the crackling of thorns under a pot.

III

Moral Cowardice

Pilate furnishes the third representative of those to whom God deigns no answer. When the governor, hearing that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, was moved with something of superstitious fear, and calling Jesus aside asked Him, "Whence art Thou?" he received no answer. Pilate's fault was moral cowardice, unwillingness to assume the responsibility of doing what he knew to be right. He was assured that Christ was innocent, yet he was unwilling to release Him. Would he do any more if he should be convinced that Jesus was indeed the Son of God? Ask rather if, having failed to release the innocent peasant he should release the Son of God, there would be any moral value in his act. The question

answers itself. The man who will not do the right as God gives him to see the right need not expect any further assistance, any stronger motives for doing it than he already has.

Here, too, we find a weakness of many prayers. Sometimes we ask God to relieve us from embarrassing decisions. A man has to choose between right and expediency, but he lacks courage, so he asks God to make events decide for him. How often, when we pray for "divine leadings," is not this the real motive of our prayer? If only God would send a storm to prevent us from keeping the engagement we ought never to have made; if only He would make it physically impossible for us to act when we lack courage to say "No," how it would simplify some of our moral crises!

So, too, we often ask God to do things which we ought to do ourselves. We wait for Him to force us to a right course. We

look for a miracle to lighten our battle with sin. We say to our brother, "Depart in peace, be warmed and fed," and think not of answering our own prayer. We pray for the purification of politics, and allow selfish interests to govern our own vote. We hold temperance meetings and reform clubs and pray for the destruction of the saloon and gambling hell, but when active effort against them would endanger our business interests we are silent. Can prayers be answered in this fashion? Was not old Noll Cromwell both spiritual and sensible when he bade his men "trust in the Lord and keep your powder dry?" The heavens will be as brass above our heads until we learn that faith and works go hand in hand, and that the cowardice of soul which makes us beg God to do our work for us can lead only to ignominy and defeat. "Wherefore criest thou unto Me?" said Jehovah to Moses; "speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

IV

Insincerity

Let us turn now from the scenes of the trial of Jesus to one of those rare and beautiful pictures from the Evangel which reveal so much of the Divine in the Son of man. He taught one day in the temple, and the Pharisees and scribes came bringing in a woman taken in sin, to see what He would say. But He turned away His face, too kind and tender to look upon her shame—(was there ever such a gentleman?)—and stooping down, wrote with His finger upon the ground as though He heard them not. Afterwards He spoke, but there was meaning in His silence. What was it?

These men were not sincere in their attitude of horror at the woman's sin. They

were ready enough to condemn her, but when brought face to face with their own consciences they were themselves convicted. Let us not be too hasty in judging them; they were not the last who have shown horror at other people's sins. It is by no means certain that they were conscious hypocrites. They reached that stage, perhaps, when they cried out for the Master's crucifixion; but now they supposed themselves honestly indignant at the wrong which had been done. It was only when they stood in the presence of that austere and accusing silence that they saw their own hearts and went out one by one, "beginning at the eldest, even unto the last."

There is no more subtle sin than that of unconscious insincerity. We ask God for things because we think we want them, or think that we think we do, if we may go so far back in our analysis. We know that we ought to want certain things, and so we pray

for them, and are surprised to find ourselves almost relieved when they do not come. Here is a man who has asked God to take a certain sin out of his life. But has he never cherished that sin, saying, "Is it not a little one?" A man tells me that in vain he has besought God to take away his appetite for drink. Has he never, having prayed that prayer, indulged the thought of how much he would enjoy the effects of a drink? A young man prays to be delivered from lust—does he never thereafter indulge in lustful thoughts or delight in impure tales? Many a man seeks deliverance from the penalty of his sin who has not learned to hate the sin itself. The disgrace of drunkenness is one thing; the degradation of soul which drunkenness brings is infinitely worse. The bondage of appetite, of habit, is hateful; but how many who feel its irksomeness have not yet seen the repulsiveness of the sin.

In like manner men pray for virtues, when

they are unwilling to make the effort, to go through the struggle—the crucifixion of self, the sacrifice of inclination and desire—through which alone these virtues can come. They pray for a larger spiritual life when at the same time they know that it must bring with it larger responsibilities of Christian effort which they are not willing to meet. They pray for a spirit of submission to God's will, while they hug their sorrow, their disappointment to their bosom, cherishing it until it becomes a sort of inverted joy. Does it seem severe, this arraignment of our weakness as insincerity, as unconscious hypocrisy? Then it is the severity of the surgeon who tells the sick man that only the knife will save him. This is a fatal disease of the soul, and one that perhaps more often than any other comes between men and their God.

All these difficulties in the religious life are usually hidden. Most of us have a pretty

good idea of ourselves, and would not recognize a really correct diagnosis of our malady. But when we have prayed, and our prayers have gone no higher than our heads, we ought to ask God to reveal us to ourselves; to show us if there has not been in our hearts some measure of unbelief, of idle curiosity, of moral cowardice, of insincerity, which has kept us from Him.

REAL NEED

43

I FALTER where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.
—TENNYSON, "In Memoriam."

THE silence of God in the presence of so much that moves human passions is one of the most awful things for humanity to contemplate. But if Jesus is His image, this silence is not wrathful or contemptuous, but full of pity and forgiveness.—HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

THOU hidden love of God, whose height,
Whose depth unfathomed, no man knows!
I see from far Thy beauteous light,
Inly I sigh for Thy repose:
My heart is pained, nor can it be
At rest, till it finds rest in Thee.
—GERHARD TERSTEEGEN, translated by J. Wesley.

I LOOK on the sky and the sea.
We were two to love and two to pray:
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing Thou didst say!
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun:
And now I cry who am but one,
Thou wilt not speak to-day.
—MRS. BROWNING, "The Runaway Slave."

In all these cases which we have been considering there is no real difficulty. We could not expect God to respond to such prayers, and the only danger is that men shall be guilty on these counts without being fully conscious of it themselves. Most of us need now and again to be awakened by some searching self-revelation. It was necessary for the prodigal, in the Master's story, to *come to himself* before he recognized his sin against a father's love.

But among the instances of the Master's silence there remains to be considered a far more difficult case, in which there existed a real and deep need, and the one who prayed was in most sincere and utter earnest, yet we read that the Lord answered her nothing. When the Syro-Phenician woman whose

daughter was grievously vexed with a demon came to Jesus and besought Him to heal her child, He at first made no reply. When even the disciples were touched and added their prayers to hers, He definitely refused to aid her, saying, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." To her He added, "It is not fitting to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs." When she responded, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the children's table," then at last He said, "O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

How shall we regard this incident? Was it an Oriental war of wits, in which an unexpected turn given to the trite Jewish proverb caused Jesus to yield? Did He actually share the bigoted prejudice which He quoted? Can it be that He was trifling with her distress? To ask these questions is to answer them. Neither can we believe that

His purpose in this apparent refusal was merely to display to the disciples as an object-lesson her faith and persistence. Not thus would the Son of man deal with a breaking heart, unless His purpose was to enlarge the blessing He would give her.

Two things we must bear in mind if we would penetrate the true inwardness of the Master's silence. The first is the tendency of the human mind to dwell upon the surface of things; the second is the truth that God is something more than a provider, a source of supplies.

Our constant temptation is to superficiality. It is not often that we will take the trouble to search out the deeper meanings of life and its experiences. We must feel the prick of the goad before we will move forward. The foundations of our life must be broken up; we must feel the shock of the storm, the fury of the tempest and the flood, ere we will dig deep and build our

house upon the rock. Accordingly God is ever seeking to drive us back upon ourselves; to compel us to ask the meaning of our morality, our faith, our prayer. Saul of Tarsus is a devotee of the Law. In it he will find salvation, to it he will devote his life. In its name he will persecute all who seem to stand in its way. He finds no peace in this service, but he struggles blindly ahead until one day God smites him down on the high road and says to him, "Saul, Saul, why wilt thou fight Me?" and Saul sees that in the name of the Law he has been opposing with all his might the spirit of the Law and of Him who gave it; that there is a morality which is infinitely deeper and worthier than ceremonial ritual or even than high ethical precepts,—a morality which, walking by the Spirit of Love, can not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Abraham believes God and rejoices in Him; but one day the conviction that he is

called upon to sacrifice his well-beloved son, of whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," causes his faith to stagger, and makes him look well to the foundations of his belief and trust, until he can say, "God will explain His meaning. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? God will provide a lamb for sacrifice." Abraham's faith has gone below the surface and laid deep hold on the character, the eternal Love of God, when he can make this last sacrifice in His name.

Job dwells securely until the repeated strokes of affliction lay him low. But when his faith, struggling upward through the darkness of his doubt and despair, can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," it has become not the idle repeating of a creed nor the easy trust of the peaceful and sunshiny day, but a sheet-anchor of the

soul which no fury of tempest nor shock of waves can dislodge.

Suppose that when this woman came to Jesus the Lord had straightway granted her request. She would have been grateful, to be sure. She would have told her friends and neighbors of the cure, and sent them all to this wonderful Physician. But is there anything in this which could speak to her of the deeper message which He came to bring? Alas for human nature, gratitude does not go far toward deepening the life. If gratitude for His favors were all that were needed to reconcile the world to God, have they not been heaped upon us? But Jesus seemed not to heed her. Be assured that if she had been a woman of weak and trembling faith which could not stand the strain, she would have received help forthwith. But Jesus saw in her the germs of a faith which if it could be brought out might change for her the whole meaning of life.

He could not bear to choke this faint beginning of spiritual life by smothering it in a luxuriant growth of easy gratitude. His silence might bewilder and chill her, but at least it would make her think. It would make her look at Him with new attention, and in penetrating the mystery of His silence, to uncover the depths of spiritual life and power. It was in keeping with His method of speech. To the multitudes, His parables were entertaining stories; to one who had ears to hear, they were full to the brim with helpful truth. So to an idle and careless heart His silence would have been baffling indeed; but to the quality of moral earnestness and spiritual perception which Jesus called faith, it became a revelation of God. His silence challenged her attention. His refusal to help any but a Jew awakened a consciousness of the spiritual value of the Jewish faith. When she accepted the epithet of "dog," and begged for a few crumbs

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from the Jewish table, there lay back of her words a recognition of her need of the spiritual food which the Jewish revelation had given to the world. Her desire had gone beneath the surface of the prayer she came to present; and when He spoke again, commending her faith and granting the boon she craved, she received along with it what was infinitely more, some dawning personal knowledge of God as He was revealed in Jesus Christ. She went to her home, not merely grateful to a wonderful Healer, but filled with new thoughts about God, a new life of joy and trust and hope such as could come only to one who had seen the Master and had been led by Him into the hidden meanings and unseen realities of life.

This brings us to the second consideration of which we spoke. God is something more than a provider. He is ever seeking to lead us to see in prayer not merely a means of

securing the satisfaction of our desires, but much more a means of communion with the mind and heart of a Heavenly Father. In this incident we have an illustration of His effort. Jesus will have this woman find Him something more than a healer, even a spiritual teacher. His silence causes her to look away from her desire, to give some attention to Him. No one could look thus on the Master without becoming conscious of the power of His Divine personality, and being led either into an angry enmity or a loving devotion to Him.

It is in these two considerations, as they interpret for us the incident of the woman of Canaan, that we shall find the true explanation of much of God's silence toward us. It is not only when we are unbelieving and untrue that He hides Himself from our eyes. Often we have gone to Him with a deep and crying need, and because we believed He

could and would help us; yet when we prayed there was no response; when trouble came upon us there was no peace.

But often our faith and our prayer rest upon the surface of things. We have asked Him for that for which we were not ready. We must wait. God could not grant our request if He would. The child in the grammar school finds one day a copy of the differential calculus. He takes it to his teacher and asks her to explain it so that he can understand it. She sends him back to his arithmetic: not for years can he receive the interpretation he seeks. But during the years he may have the inspiring friendship of the teacher.

I hear a beautiful song. I buy a copy and go to a master of singing, and say to him, "Teach me to sing this song." He takes it away from me, and sends me back to scales and exercises. Months must pass before I can learn the song. But during all

the months I am growing in my appreciation of music, and its melodies are attuning my soul to harmony, so that when at length I take up the song it speaks to me with a wealth of meaning I could never have received before. So when I see a beautiful life I go to God and say to Him, "Make me such an one as he." And God sends me back to my daily task, my struggle, my partial success and partial failure: only in the years can such a life grow. But through the years the nights and the days may be filled with the holiest companionship, as

> "The Savior comes and walks with me,
> And sweet communion here have we."

It is for this that God must for a time hide His face from us. It is not a difficult thing to repeat the creed, with something of a glow at heart withal,—"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." But one day the shock of a great trouble comes upon us, and we stand amid

the wreck and ruin of all that seemed stable and sure in our life. We reach out through the darkness for the God in whom we believed, and we can only

"Grope,
And gather dust and chaff."

Yet little by little our faltering faith struggles on through doubt and despair until it once more lays hold on God. The deep tides of His strength flow through us, and out of the weltering chaos which surrounds us the primeval miracle is wrought once more as God says, "Let there be light," and there is light. What a different thing in our mouths now is the creed we repeat, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." It is no longer the easy assurance of care-free and untried youth, but the strong confidence of him who out of the depths has cried unto God and has been strengthened.

It would be a sorry thing for humanity if God should always and without hesitation

answer our prayers, even our worthy ones. Our minds are filled with the thought of our desires. God seeks rather to give us Himself. Only by His silence can He startle us out of our easy reliance on His good will, and lead us to seek for His fellowship and His love. A friend was sick: we prayed, "O God, if it be Thy will let him be restored." We tried to mean what we said, to be fully resigned to the will of God. Yet our mind was full of our prayer, and of our effort after self-command. What we sought was peace, and no peace came. We were in deep sorrow, and we had heard of the comforting presence of the Master. We prayed for that. We thought we were seeking Christ Himself. In reality, what we wanted was comfort, and no comfort came. Perhaps our prayer was for a larger knowledge of God, a deeper, fuller religious life. Yet what we really wanted was less of a conflict, less temptation, less of struggle with

sin. No blessing came. Or we have heard some saintly Christian tell of the happiness of a life of complete surrender to God, and we have prayed for this. But our mind was full of the desire for happiness, nay, call it blessedness if you will,—what we wanted was the bliss. For all these things have we prayed, and with strong effort after faith, yet no answer came. But suppose we had obtained the blessing we sought—would there have been any more of God in our lives than before? Would we have been any more really, more completely in harmony with Him?

But when He did not answer we began to be a little disturbed, almost angry. A dangerous thing—to be angry with God? Better an honest anger than self-satisfied complacency. Did Jesus rebuke Martha when, her heart hot within her, she went out to reproach Him for failing her in her need? She was not thinking of her brother, but of

the Friend whom she had trusted. Did He not know that out of this misunderstanding might grow a deeper comprehension of Him and His love than could come in any other way? So it is when for a time God is silent to our prayers. The ground shifts, and the question is no longer on the thing we craved, but on God's relation to us. We look away from our needs and desires, to give attention to Him. When the soul is in this mood, it is not long before we learn that better than all gifts is the love and companionship of the Giver. When by His silence, His rebukes, His revelation of Himself He has brought us to this point He can safely grant our petition and we go our way, having received not our request alone, but God. Nay, if now He finds it necessary to deny what we asked, we still have Him, and all things are ours. The supreme need of the human soul is God: not anything He can give; not joy nor peace nor strength; not freedom from

struggle, from sorrow, from temptation; not even freedom from sin, even this is purely incidental. Said Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless till they rest in Thee."

After all, the deepest self-revelation comes not through speech, but through silence. There is a silence which hides the soul of a man, as it is written, "Even a fool when he is silent seemeth wise." There is a silence also that is revealing, for the fool will hold his peace when he ought to speak, and the whole world will know his folly. Whether the silence be that of dullness which has nothing to say, or that of thought too full for speech, it has its own character, and to the thoughtful man is self-revealing. It is not the talk of your friend which shows you his heart. We distrust the love, the joy or the grief that is too glibly expressed. The deepest emotions are silent, as Nature's greatest forces, gravitation and sunlight and

life, are silent forces. So it is in the Valley of Silence that we hear the unspoken words of the Divine Father, and our souls are knit to His infinite heart.

Let no man lose heart in the silence. Let him not dream, in the silence, God does not love him, never think He has forsaken. Our ears are deaf to the music of the spheres. We do not hear the softest whispers of our Mother Nature. The glory that shall be revealed; the joy that is fulfilled and which no man taketh from us; the infinite riches of the fullness with which the Lord will fill us in the day of His coming, these are things which can not now be tasted. This may be for you the day of sorrow and of darkness, of heaviness through manifold temptation. Only be sure that if He is silent when you cry, it is because there is for you a richer blessing in the silence than in any word which He might speak.

I walk down the Valley of Silence,
Down the dim, voiceless valley, alone;
And I hear not the fall of a footstep
Around me—save God's and my own;
And the hush of my heart is as holy
As hovers when angels have flown.

Do you ask what I found in the Valley?
'T is my trysting place with the Divine;
And I fell at the feet of the Holy,
And above me a voice said, "Be Mine."
And there rose from the depth of my spirit,
The echo, "My heart shall be Thine."

In the hush of the Valley of Silence
I dream all the songs that I sing;
And the music floats down the dim valley,
Till each finds a word for a wing,
That to me, like the dove of the deluge,
The message of peace they may bring.

But far on the deep there are billows
That never shall break on the beach,
And I have heard songs in the silence
That never shall float into speech;
And I have dreams in the Valley
Too lofty for language to reach.

Do you ask me the place of the Valley,
Ye hearts that are harrowed by care?
It lies far away between mountains,
And God and His angels are there;
And one is the dark Mount of Sorrow,
And one the bright Mountain of Prayer.

—Father Ryan.

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